It Takes Two to Tango: Strategies for Developing Romantic Relationships and Sexuality

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Glossary
Chapter 1
What Can I Expect Now That I Have a TBI?

I’m an individual with a TBI. When I was injured, the frontal lobe of my brain was injured.

The frontal lobe is responsible for many functions. Here are some things that my frontal lobe does:

**Self-awareness:** An understanding of my own personality and actions and how they might be viewed by others.

**Recognition of others’ emotions:** Understanding what other people are thinking based on their tone of voice, what they say, and their body language.

**Inhibition:** Ability to control my actions.

**Emotional regulation:** Ability to control my emotions and express them in a healthy and productive way.
These are some things that have happened with damage to my frontal lobe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Challenges</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>List a personal example you may have experienced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decreased self-awareness:</strong> I have a hard time understanding how my personality and actions impact other people.</td>
<td>I say and do things that may not always match the situation. Understanding how my personality and actions may impact other people will help better my interactions with them.</td>
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<td><strong>Difficulty reading others’ emotions:</strong> I have a hard time understanding what other people are thinking based on their tone of voice, what they say, and their body language.</td>
<td>Figuring out what people mean when their words don’t match their tone of voice or body language can be confusing.</td>
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<td><strong>Disinhibition:</strong> Sometimes I have a hard time controlling my words and actions, which may negatively impact other people.</td>
<td>At times I think thoughts that are not nice, but I should not say them because it may hurt someone. This means I need to “filter” my thoughts before I say them out loud.</td>
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<td><strong>Decreased emotional regulation:</strong> I have a hard time controlling my emotions and expressing them in a healthy and productive way.</td>
<td>I often get angry and frustrated, but it’s important to control the way I express these emotions so that I do not hurt other peoples’ feelings.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
All of these changes to my frontal lobe have made it difficult for me to talk with others, form romantic relationships, and develop my sexuality.

*If you are not sure what an underlined word means, you can find the definition in the glossary located on page 29.

Look for me in the illustrations, I’ll help guide you through some situations and show you some strategies that you may find useful when interacting with others and forming relationships.
Chapter 2
Matching Your Actions to Certain Situations

Understanding how your personality and actions impact your interaction with others is an important step when trying to develop relationships. Here are some strategies that may help with increasing your self-awareness.

Here are things to think about when entering into an interaction:

1. What do I think will go well and what are possible problems?
2. What skills do I have to make this interactions go well and what skills do I need?
3. Decide to enter into the interaction or decide not to at this time.
4. Reflect on the interaction: did it go as planned?
5. What can I do differently next time?
OH THERE'S BECCA, I'VE BEEN WANTING TO ASK HER OUT

GREAT IDEA! WHAT ARE POSSIBLE WAYS THIS MIGHT GO?

1. SHE WILL SAY YES.
2. SHE'LL SAY MAYBE.
3. SHE'LL SAY NO.

OK, SO NOW THAT YOU HAVE A PLAN... WHAT SKILLS DO YOU HAVE TO ASK BECCA ON A DATE?

SKILLS I HAVE

1. I CAN START A CONVERSATION.
2. I AM POLITE.
3. I'M FUNNY.

WHAT MIGHT BE HARD FOR ME

1. I'M SOMETIMES IMPATIENT.
2. I MIGHT NOT WANT TO TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER.

I THINK YOU'RE REALLY HOT, DO YOU WANT TO GO OUT WITH ME?

ENTER INTO THE INTERACTION

REFLECT ON INTERACTION. WHAT CAN YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?

I NEED TO PRACTICE INTRODUCING MYSELF. I'M NOT AS GOOD AT THAT AS I THOUGHT.

MAYBE NEXT TIME I SHOULDN'T STAND SO CLOSE TO HER SO SHE'S NOT UNCOMFORTABLE.

NEXT TIME I SHOULD ASK HER HOW SHE'S DOING IN ORDER TO BE POLITE OR COMPLIMENT HER PERSONALITY INSTEAD OF HER LOOKS.

UMM, NO THANKS, I'M NOT INTERESTED
Things to think about when entering into an interaction:

1. What do I think will go well and what are possible problems?
2. What skills do I have to make this interaction go well and what skill do I need?
3. Decide to enter into the interaction or decide not to at this time.
4. Reflect on the interaction: did it go as planned?
5. What can I do differently next time?
How can you apply these strategies for successful interaction in your own life?

*This is a worksheet to help you work on your self-awareness. This can be completed alone, with a family member, or with a friend.

Imagine a situation where you would like to interact with someone, and write it in the box below.

Think of the people involved in this interaction and list them in the box below.

What strategies (listed on the previous page) would you like to use during this interaction? List them in the box below.

How can you apply the strategies you wrote above to your chosen situation for successful interaction? List your answer in the box below.
Chapter 3
People Can Be Confusing: How to Tell What Other People are Feeling

It is important to understand what others are thinking so you can interact with them successfully. Here are some strategies that may help you better recognize others’ emotions.

Signs that show others are interested in conversation:
1. Body is facing towards you.
2. Eye contact is being made.
3. Tone of voice is calm, pleasant, or serious.
4. Responses are longer and well thought out.
5. Facial expressions match the conversation.

Signs that show others are not interested in conversation:
1. Body is facing away from you.
2. No eye contact is being made.
3. Tone of voice is sad, angry, or judgmental.
4. Responses are short or there is a lot of silence.
5. Facial expressions do not match the conversation.

Now I will show you two scenarios…
This scenario is an example of a person with body language that says, "I am not interested in conversation."

You see a friend and want to ask if he would like to go to the movies this weekend.

Hi, how are you? Would you like to see a movie with me this weekend?

I don't know, I'm pretty busy.

Notice lack of eye contact, and the position of his body.

Well, could you check your schedule and let me know?

I'll try.

Well, I'll talk to you later.

Every interaction may not turn out the way you want it to and that is ok.

Notice short response, body position, and lack of eye contact.
This scenario is an example of a person with body language that says, "I am interested in conversation."

**You see a friend and want to ask if he would like to go to the movies this weekend.**

**Hi, how are you? Would you like to see a movie with me this weekend?**

**Hi, I'll have to check my schedule. I may have other plans.**

**This type of response may upset you, but don't forget your friend has the right to make his own choices.**

**Alright, well once you check your schedule will you text me and let me know?**

**Yeah, I can do that!**

**Well, talk to you later!**

**Sounds good!**

**Notice the eye contact being made, body positioning and smiling faces.**
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2. No eye contact is being made.
3. Tone of voice is sad, angry, or judgmental.
4. Responses are short or there is a lot of silence.
5. Facial expressions do not match the conversation.
How can you apply these strategies for successful interaction in your own life?

*This is a worksheet to help you work on recognizing the emotions of others. This can be completed alone, with a family member, or with a friend.

Imagine a situation where you would like to interact with someone, and write it in the box below.

Think of the people involved in this interaction and list them in the box below.

What strategies (listed on the previous page) would you like to use during this interaction? List them in the box below.

How can you apply the strategies you wrote above to your chosen situation for successful interaction? List your answer in the box below.
Chapter 4
Taking Charge of Your Emotions

Understanding and controlling your own emotions and frustrations is important when interacting with other people, this is called emotional regulation. This may be difficult to do during times of frustration; however, it will help maintain healthy and successful relationships with others.

1. If feeling bad, frustrated, or confused, stop and think, “What am I feeling?”
2. Think, “What might be making me feel this way? Is my anger due to this specific interaction OR is my anger the result of past frustrations that I have from previous interactions?”
3. Decide, “Is this a big deal or a little deal? Is this scary or not scary?”
4. Know that you are in charge of the way you feel.
5. Think, “What can I do to decrease my anger or frustration?”

Here are some of the things I try to do when I’m upset:

- Try to understand the other person’s point of view
- Take a break from the conversation
- Take deep breaths
- Slowly count to 10 before responding to the person
RESTAURANT

SHE'S 15 MINUTES LATE! THAT'S SO RUDE, I BET SHE ISN'T COMING!

1. STOP AND THINK, WHAT ARE YOU FEELING?
2. WHY ARE YOU FEELING THIS WAY?

I'M FEELING ANGRY, FRUSTRATED, AND FORGOTTEN.

I FEEL THIS WAY BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T BOTHER TO CALL OR TEXT.

I'M SORRY I HAD A FLAT TIRE AND FORGOT MY PHONE AT HOME!

YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF HOW YOU FEEL, HOW CAN YOU DECREASE YOUR ANGER?

I'M STILL FEELING ANGRY, BUT SHE DIDN'T MEAN TO BE LATE.

THIS IS A LITTLE DEAL. TAKE A DEEP BREATH.

TRY TO UNDERSTAND HER POINT OF VIEW.

IS THIS A BIG DEAL OR A LITTLE DEAL?
Strategies to help with emotional regulation:

1. If feeling bad, frustrated, or confused, stop and think, “What am I feeling?”
2. Think, “What might be making me feel this way? Is my anger due to this specific interaction OR is my anger the result of past frustrations that I have from previous interactions?”
3. Decide, “Is this a big deal or a little deal? Is this scary or not scary?”
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How can you apply these strategies for successful interaction in your own life?

*This is a worksheet to help you work on emotional regulation. This can be completed alone, with a family member, or with a friend.

Imagine a situation where you would like to interact with someone, and write it in the box below.

Think of the people involved in this interaction and list them in the box below.

What strategies (listed on the previous page) would you like to use during this interaction? List them in the box below.

How can you apply the strategies you wrote above to your chosen situation for successful interaction? List your answer in the box below.
Chapter 5
Engaging in Healthy Relationships

It feels comforting to be in a relationship and share intimate experiences with another person. However, sometimes relationships can become unhealthy or unsafe. Here are some signs that describe a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship. Also listed are some strategies on how to recognize when you may be in an unhealthy relationship.

Signs of a healthy relationship:

1. Both individuals have an equal say in the decisions that are made.
2. Both individuals listen to one another equally.
3. Both individuals say more positive comments to one another than negative comments.
4. Arguments are normal in a relationship and may include sharing your personal frustrations with your partner and respectful disagreement.

Signs of an unhealthy relationship:

1. One person is taking control of the decisions being made.
2. One person is not listening to what the other individual has to say.
3. There are more negative comments being made to one person than positive comments.
4. Unhealthy arguments may include hurtful comments, name calling, or physical violence (such as hitting, pushing, or throwing things).
Strategies you can use to recognize an unhealthy relationship:

1. Identify signs that the relationship may be healthy or unhealthy.
2. Is your boyfriend or girlfriend isolating you from your family and friends? It is important that first dates be in a public place or with others.
3. Ask a trusted individual for advice on the situation.
4. Know that you have the power to control your response to a situation.
5. You have the power to remove yourself from the interaction, situation, or the entire relationship.
I REALLY MISS YOU. WILL YOU PLEASE BE MY GIRLFRIEND AGAIN?

NO, I DON'T WANT TO BE WITH YOU. I HAVE MOVED ON.

BUT I REALLY WANT TO BE WITH YOU. PLEASE!

I REALLY DON'T WANT TO DATE ANYMORE. PLEASE STOP CALLING AND TEXTING SO MUCH.

THIS SEEMS UNHEALTHY. ONE PERSON IS NOT LISTENING TO WHAT THE OTHER PERSON IS SAYING.

PLEASE STOP FOLLOWING ME. YOU ARE SCARING ME. I WILL CALL THE POLICE!

I'M NOT TRYING TO SCARE HER. I SHOULD STOP FOLLOWING HER.

I'M NOT TRYING TO SCARE YOU. I'M SORRY. I'LL LEAVE YOU ALONE.

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO REMOVE YOURSELF FROM AN UNHEALTHY INTERACTION.

THIS SEEMS HEALTHY. HE IS LISTENING TO HER AND REMOVING HIMSELF FROM THE SITUATION.
John: Hey, I think we should meet in person.

Me: Awesome, I've been telling my friends about you, can they come?

John: No, I think it should just be the two of us. I don't want to meet your friends yet.

Me: Ok, well then let's go to a coffee shop downtown.

John: No, I was thinking you could come to my house for coffee.

Me: I want to meet you, but it just doesn't feel right the way you are in charge of everything. I would like to meet in a coffee shop or bring a friend.

John: Well you are just paranoid. I don't think this is gonna work.

Me: If that is how you feel I don't think this will work either.
Signs of a healthy relationship:

1. Both individuals have an equal say in the decisions that are made.
2. Both individuals listen to one another equally.
3. Both individuals say more positive comments to one another than negative comments.
4. Arguments are normal in a relationship and may include sharing your personal frustrations with your partner and respectful disagreement.

Signs of an unhealthy relationship:

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Strategies one can use to recognize an unhealthy relationship:

1. Identify signs that the relationships may be healthy or unhealthy.
2. Is your boyfriend or girlfriend isolating you from your family and friends? It is important that first dates be in a public place or with others.
3. Ask a trusted individual for advice on the situation.
4. Know that you have the power to control your response to a situation.
5. You have the power to remove yourself from the interaction, situation, or the entire relationship.
How can you apply these strategies for successful interaction in your own life?

*This is a worksheet to help you engage in healthy relationships. This can be completed alone, with a family member, or with a friend.

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Think of the people involved in this interaction and list them in the box below.

What strategies (listed on the previous page) would you like to use during this interaction? List them in the box below.

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Glossary

**Self-awareness**: An awareness of my own personality and actions and how they might be viewed by others.

**Recognition of others’ emotions**: Understanding what other people are thinking based on their tone of voice, what they say, and their body language.

**Inhibition**: Ability to control my actions and not act on or say everything I think. Use your “filter” during social interactions.

**Emotional regulation**: Ability to control my emotions and express them in a healthy and productive way.

**Romantic Relationships**: A relationship that is willingly entered into by two people, based on love or attraction, and positively benefits both individuals involved (Collins, 2003).

**Sexuality**: A person’s sexual identity and how he or she may express this identity through thoughts, feelings, desires, and behaviors (World Health Organization, 2006).
References

